

Educational theory of  
jean jacques  
rousseau education  
essay



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Jean Jacque Rousseau was a great philosopher born in Geneva on 28 June 1712; he died in Ermenoville in 1778. His contributions are social and political theories with the social contract of 1762, an essay of fundamental questions of social justice and political legitimacy. He also wrote a very important book on education theory through wider intent, *Emile* or on education (1762) which has influenced on the society at the present time. (Routledge, 2005, p. 21). The course of his life is also very remarkable his mother died just after a few days after his birth; he left Geneva on impulse when he was not yet sixteen, converted to Roman Catholicism, was taken in by and became the lover of a woman thirteen years older than himself. That relationship failed after several years. (Taneja, V. R. 2010, pp. 103-104). In education factor, Rousseau conveyed his educational philosophy through his famous novel, *Emile*, which tells the story of the boy's education from infancy to adolescent. He believed that people were noble savages, innocent, free, and uncorrupted by socioeconomic artificialities and the goal of his education is "to create learning environment that allow the children innate natural goodness to flourish which closely related to the nature that children experience". (Course Reading Foundation of Education, pp. 135-135). The following parts, you will be familiar with the questions:

What was Rousseau's philosophy?

What were Rousseau's Aims and Methods of Education?

What were Rousseau's application principles of teaching and learning in *Emile*?

Should Rousseau's methods of education be applied in Cambodian schools now?

## **Rousseau's philosophy**

The three influences worked in shaping his general philosophy related to the state of time, varied experience of his life and his impulsive and emotional nature. All this work gives insight into his political, social and educational philosophy. The key note of his philosophy was to have a " State of Nature, Natural man and Natural Civilization." (Taneja, V. R. 2010, p. 105). Rousseau wanted men to be free from the bondage of society by education them not for citizenship but for manhood. He believed that civilization, the arts and all human institutions had a pernicious effect. According to him the source of all social evils is to be found in the restless curiosity of which the sciences and arts are the final products. Man, he believed, would have been happier if he had been allowed to remain in primitive stage as a creature of feeling. Man had brought misery to him by his own inventions. Rousseau stated that these inventions should be scrapped off and the man would become happy. Rousseau's philosophy is usually designated by the term " Naturalism" (Taneja, V. R. 2010, p. 106). He contended that all the ill and miseries of civilization are due to a departure from a State of Nature. Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Author of Nature; but everything degenerates in the hand of the man. Return to the nature was his method to cure the world of troubles. Life according to Nature was genuine. It recognized the worth of the individual on his own merits. It was free from the trammels of usage, tradition and tyranny. By Natural state and Natural man he did not want primitive social order and the savage man. He wanted

natural civilization and a fully developed man living in the whirl of social life without being carried away by the passion and prejudices of society. His ideal of the state of Nature was, “ a simple farming community or state without evils” (Taneja, V. R. 2010, p. 105). Rousseau said that human Nature is good and should be all a free development. Education, therefore, must be in harmony with original and unspoiled human nature. By nature here Rousseau meant native instincts, tendencies and capacities. He held that learning takes place best when child is free to develop and grow according to his natural impulses. The function of education is to preserve children’s goodness and purity without stain from the world. He thought human restraints and discipline should be discarded. His naturalism holds that the best learning comes from dealing with natural objects with natural arts and with reason in natural ways. Rousseau glorified the wholesome development of all the natural powers of the individual. If the individual is nurtured properly so that his physical, emotional, moral and mental capacities are allowed to develop naturally and at the proper time, the cause of education and the society will be best served. He looked to the individual rather than to the society to find the ultimate aims of education. The two most famous accounts of “ the state of nature” prior to Rousseau’s are those of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. ([http://www. iep. utm. edu/rousseau/](http://www.iep.utm.edu/rousseau/))

## **Rousseau’s Aims and Methods of Education**

Rousseau revolted against the entire conception of education which forcing the children to accept model of adult. His novel Emile attacks the child’s depravity theory and an extensively verbal and literary education which is expected children to speak, think and act as miniature adult. The goal of his

education is to “ create learning environment that allow the children to innate natural goodness which rely on sensation and experience with the nature.” (Course Reading Foundation of Education, pp. 134-137) He also believes that child must be free from society imprisoning institution, of which the school was one of the most coercive. He said that teacher can train the man or the citizen; he cannot train natural man. His natural man was the one whose natural virtues had not been influenced by traditional and social institution. On the other hand their natural virtues were so developed that they were able to adapt themselves to the changing environment. To Rousseau, education was a process of guidance by teacher rather than instruction by him. “ The role of teacher was to assist the nature rather than posting the convention to children”. (Course Reading Foundation of Education, pp. 134-135). He was emphatic in saying that education was a process of development into an enjoyable, rational, harmoniously balanced, useful and hence natural life. Simple and direct methods were created by him. Laying a special emphasis on objects teaching he remarked “ Let the sense always be the guides, let there be no book but the world and no other instructions than facts.” (Taneja, V. R. 2010, p. 108). His advice was that, “ in general, never substitute the sign for the thing itself, save when it is impossible to show the things for the sign absorb the attention of the child and make him forget the thing represented.” (Taneja, V. R. 2010, p. 109). All these precepts of Rousseau are being increasingly recognized in modern education, which lays the greatest stress on concrete teaching. Child, he believes, should be taught by experience not by verbal lesson. Rousseau advocated that the play-way was the best method to make children learning. Knowing childhood was his first concept. Ignorance of child nature is the root

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of educational errors. The tutor should study the nature of his pupil. Each mind has a form of its own; but the traits of child's mind can be learnt only by observation as they develop. Wise education proceeds by observing the child and adopting its measures to his individual capacities and needs

## **Rousseau's application principles of teaching and learning in Emile**

Since his principles require educators to study the child from the beginning, he divided his principles into four factors: (1) the generic character of mankind refers to those characters which are variously manifested in the dispositions or inclination. (2) different characteristics of sexes refer to his first principle of natural education as Rousseau understands it that sex should be taken into account in the upbringing of boys and girls. According to him, the nature of the two sexes is different from the beginning. That makes necessary the corresponding the differences in their education. For this reason, he would have the boy educated to be a complete human being with worldwide interest, and the girl to be trained for the wifhood and motherhood.(3) difference in individuality refers to each mind has a form of it own. It must be directed accordingly. Individuality he pointed out raises many problems “ one has to be flattered, another has to be repressed. One man is made to carry human knowledge to its fathers point; another may find the ability to read a dangerous power” (4) differences of ages: at this point, Rousseau identified five developmental stages infancy from birth to five years old, the child make his first contact with objects in the environment and learn directly from his senses. Childhood the age from five to twelve, the child constructs his personality as he becomes aware that his

actions cause either painful or pleasurable consequences. Motivated by curiosity, he actively explores his environment, learning more about the world through his senses. Rousseau called the eyes, ears, hands and feet the teacher considered the senses better and more efficient than the schoolmaster, who teaches words the learners don't understand. Emile's tutor deliberately refrained from introducing books at this stage to avoid substituting reading for the child's direct interaction with nature. Boyhood from twelve to fifteen, at this stage the children can learn the natural science by observing the circles of the growth of the plants and animals. By exploring this surrounding, the children learn geography far more realistically than from studying maps. In Emile, it is also learned a manual trade, carpentry, to make the connection between mental and physical work. Adolescence from age fifteen to the time of marriage, around 25 years old at this stage children become adults and they are now already to cope with the outside world and to learn about society, government, economics, and business. Rousseau prefers natural to social and emphasize human intrinsic as an initial mean to knowledge. He believes that school often interferes with learning. Schooling teachers teach children to play the role that adults prefer rather than repress their natural interact and impulse. Rousseau used the following key ideas to form his educational philosophy (a) childhood is an important foundation of human development; (b) children's natural interest and instincts are valuable beginnings of a more thorough exploration of the environment. (c) human beings, in their infancy in their life cycles, go through necessary stages of development, (d) adult coercion has a negative impact on children's development. (Taneja, V. R. 2010, pp. 109-116 & Course

Reading Foundation of Education, pp. 134-137)

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## **Should Rousseau's methods of education be applied in Cambodia school?**

As every one have known already, Cambodia goes through many stages of the society: Pre French colonial (before 1863), French colonial era (1863-1953), post-French colonial (1953-1970), political turmoil of Lon Nol regime or the Khmer Republic (1970-1975), Genocidal regime of Khmer Rouge or Pol Pot Regime (1975-1979), Heng Samrin regime (1979-1989) and the post general election period (1993-present). In accordance with Chandler, 1988, Cambodian (Khmer) people were among the first in Asia to adopt religious idea and political institution from India (Chandler, 1998; Encyclopedia Britannica, 2001). Since the Khmer immersed themselves in Buddhism, the teaching of Buddhist principles was institutionalized and “ basic literacy” was needed for religious leaders to cultivate religious concepts and to help lead civil society. The Buddhist temple schools were established and opened for boys and young men where they could learn moral ethics, literacy and some Buddhist advice about life. The curriculum consisted of the study of Pali of Buddhist doctrine, Khmer language, Mathematics, Cambodian history, geography, science, hygiene, civics and agriculture. In 1985, the “ objective of Cambodia's education was to reserve the revolutionary socialism of Kampuchea and to form new and good, hard-working citizen with good health, technical awareness and support for the revolutionary Kampuchea. Schools were to be organized as cultural centers open to all and as a system of defense against enemy propaganda” (Yres, 2000, p. 452). The teachers were volunteers Buddhist men (monks- sangha or achaj). (Sideth S. Dy, 2003). They taught the students through teacher-center methods by lecturing and requiring student to recite the lesson. From pre-colonial until

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1990 the methods of teaching that the teachers used in their teaching performance were similar. Late 1990, International organizations (IOs) and Non organizations (NGOs) diversified their support programs and activities to facilitate and assist the least developed nations. (Windham, 1992).

Cambodia was among the countries under supporting from those organizations, so fund and technical aids for developing education sector were also granted. Since that time, the methodologies used in Cambodia have been better gradually. For methodology, if the curricula makers consider diverse methods, it will be useful for transferring the knowledge to the student. For one example, Rousseau' method is very important to stimulate the student because the young children can learn effectively by playing and experimenting with materials, they can learn best by actively manipulating objects largely stem from the idea of the lesson or social life in the society. The student can seek for deep understanding and unpack issues by themselves and they can reach philosophers and psychologists. If Rousseau's method could be applied in Cambodia, the students would probably acquire real knowledge, skills, in order to get the prosperous life, to help the heir own family with better standard of living as well as the nation.

## **Conclusion**

Rousseau was a great revolutionary. Led partly by personal feeling and partly by sympathy for the common people he revolted against the social inequalities of his age. He propounded in place the old law of reason, the new gospel of faith in nature. Although Rousseau possessed an unusual power of embodying great idea in words, he had very slight ability to relate them in action. His great contribution in field of education was his was his

educational methods by showing the value of motivation, creating the problems, and utilizing the senses and activities of the child. His concept of freedom, growth, interests and activities were greatly needed at the time against authoritarianism and absolutism in education. In the future, if Cambodia education factor can assimilate his philosophy to make effective reforms in educational system through curriculum reform, manual reform, teaching methodology reform, principles of assessment reform and basic instructional material reform, It would be the best way to let the young generation know the ways how to conceptualize through the new things so that they can improve their cognitive and motor skills.